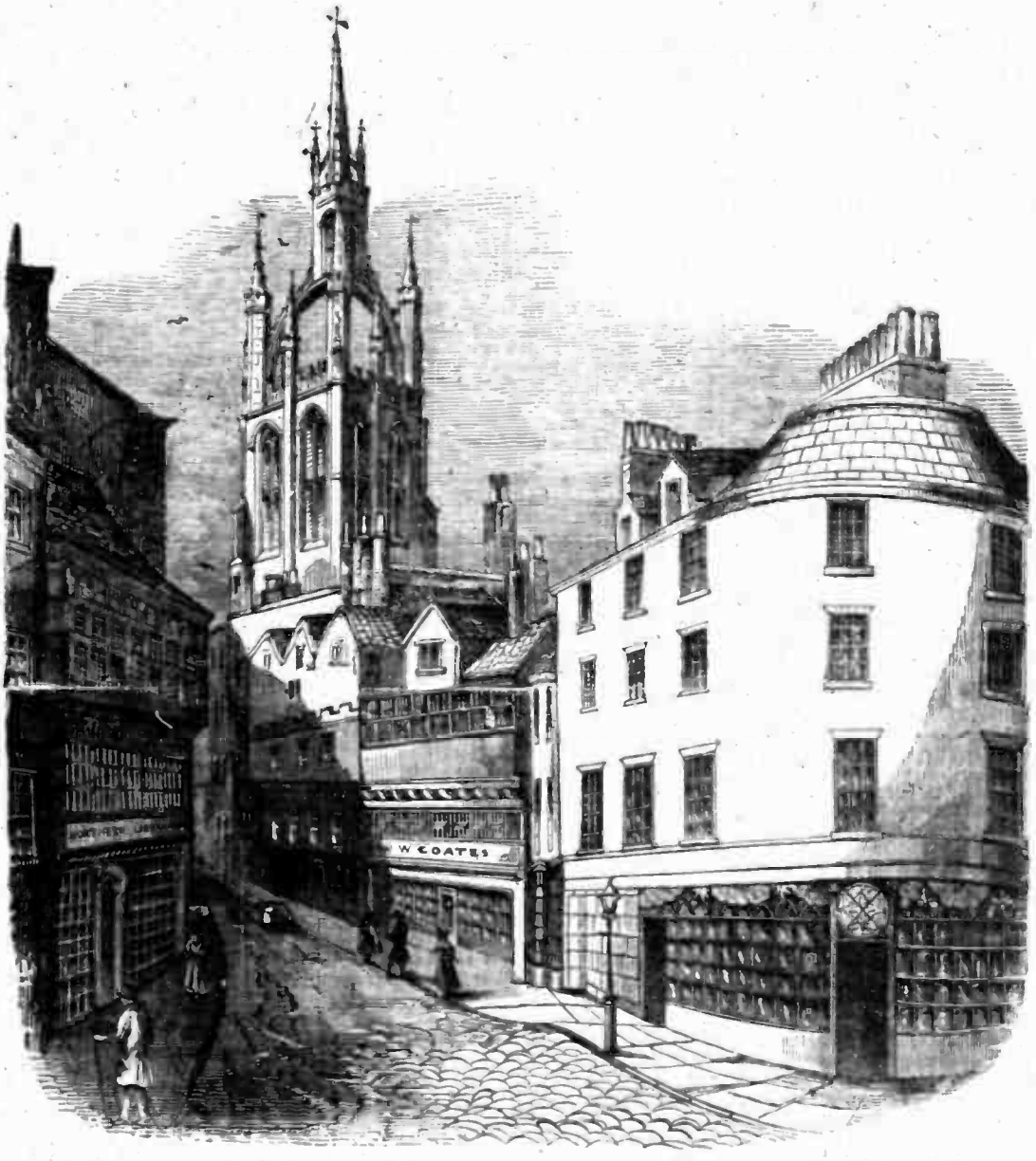

ST. NICHOLAS' CHURCH.

were removed. The entrance to this place is on the west, and part of the roof of the porch still remains. It extends to about half the breadth of the transept, and at the east end was found a beautiful small window, in the form of a Catherine wheel, which had been blocked up. In the south wall is part of a basin for holy water, and a deep drain cut in the floor had been boarded over; the roof is arched with stone; various conjectures have been formed respecting this place. It has not been a subterraneous oratory, for anciently it must have been very little below the surface of the ground, which has been much raised on the outside, even in modern times; some think that it was originally designed for a chantry, and others, with greater probability, that it has been used as a confessional. The door and window of this curious place have been built up again, and the earth levelled, but the small east window which opens into St. George's Porch may still be seen. The west arch of St. George's Porch has been walled up and formed into a kind of vestry, used as a robing-room for the magistrates, and for the accommodation of christening parties.

The south transept of the church is called St. Mary's Porch, and is supposed to be the chantry of Our Lady,§ founded in the reign of Edward I. It is 48 feet long and 25½ feet broad; it was formerly much larger, but in 1783 the west arch was built up with brick, and the space thus gained was formed into a porch which leads into the churchyard. The funeral service is generally read here, and on each side are part of the old oak stalls belonging to the church.

The great east window of the church is very magnificent, and has evidently been introduced as an alteration of the ancient structure, and displays the later form of English architecture in its most just and beautiful proportions, being adorned, but not crowded, with tracery, which runs out in the most elegant manner.

According to Grey, this window was built by the munificent Roger Thornton, the elder, and there was inscribed upon it, "Orate pro anima Rogeri de Thornton, and pro animabus filiorum et filiarum." There were also in it the twelve apostles and seven deeds of charity painted on glass. There now remains but two heads, and a few small fragments of the original pictures in this once "sumptuous window." There has been an attempt made to introduce some modern painting on glass into the centre of this window, but it is very badly executed.

The east division of this edifice seems to have undergone so many repairs as to retain few marks of its original formation. There are three narrow, plain, unassuming windows, with two mullions bisected at the top in the pointed style, on the south side of the nave, and four similar ones on the north side, which are doubtless parts of the original building. Specimens of the plain, square, upright buttress, are also still attached to the north side of the nave and to both of the transepts. The windows in the choir are larger, and ornamented at the top by a quatrefoil. The large window in St. Mary's porch, and some others, are on a more expansive scale, and portioned out with mullions and ornamented heads, and diversified by horizontal decorated transoms; they belong to a later period. The windows in the clerestory, with their ungraceful obtuse arched tops, are quite modern and foreign to the general character of the building.

In 1734, Sir Walter Blackett built over the vestry a "*handsome modern house*," for the reception of the books of Dr. Thomlinson and other benefactors. The style of this erection but ill accords with the Gothic fabric to which it is so awkwardly appended, but at the time of its erection very few had cultivated a taste for ecclesiastical architecture. The windows of the choir in the line of this building were necessarily blocked up, but the want of light is partly supplied by a dome light in the roof of the south aisle.

The font of this church stands in the north transept. It is of a simple form, but has a most magnificent and very lofty cover or canopy, of very delicate and curious workmanship. It is supposed to have been made by Robert Rhodes, the builder of the steeple; which conjecture is very probable, not only from the airy elegance of the design, but also from his arms being sculptured upon the basin; the arms are "parted per fess, gules and azure; in chief is a greyhound current, and in base three annulets. There is likewise quartered with this coat argent a chevron gules, between three rooks, or, within a border engrailed, supposed to be the coat of Agnes, wife of Robert Rhodes." These arms have been formerly coloured. On Thursday, July 16th,

§ "This church surpassed all others in the north, both in the number and richness of its chantries; there were nine or rather ten at the suppression, which were valued at £81. 6s. 6d. per annum."—*Hist. Newcastle.*

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